

Sacredise Daily Worship

Personal Worship Resources for the Week:

24 – 30 December 2017

Thought for the Week:

The focus of the fourth Sunday in Advent is always Mary, the mother of Jesus. This remarkable woman gave birth not just to a unique baby, but to a whole new way of being through her divine son. One of the problems with Advent and Christmas is that the stories that guide these seasons can be framed in ways that make us passive observers of God's amazing work. It can be tempting to think of God as dwelling outside of our human world, and swooping in to make things right when they go wrong. It can be tempting to view faith as simply receiving blessing and salvation from God, and then waiting for God to fix the world or take us to heaven. But, to interpret the incarnation in this way is to miss its power and challenge.

The Bible is filled with ordinary people who were used by God to accomplish extraordinary things. Often they did nothing more than live their lives with faithfulness and love, but God used the small seeds of their daily routines to change the world. Mary is one of these people, and her example of faithful obedience is one that can be followed by every God-seeker.

This week we meditate on God's call to participate in the miracle of incarnation, and we celebrate the Christ Child, and the new way of being that he brought to us.

Christmas Eve Sunday 24 December 2017

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

Reflection: We like to think of Mary as unique. This may be because we struggle to imagine that God would use an ordinary person to give birth to such a unique child. But, maybe it's also because it lets us off the hook. If Mary was somehow "more" than us, then God cannot expect of us what God expected of her. Then we can celebrate her, without feeling any responsibility. But, Mary was just an ordinary young girl. The fact that God chose her simply reveals that God loves to use ordinary people.

In one sense giving birth to Jesus was something that happened to Mary. She did nothing to cause God to choose her, or to bring the birth of Jesus about. She simply received God's call and waited, as all mothers do, for her time to come to give birth. But, in another sense, Mary was a very active participant in God's work. God did not force her to be the mother of Christ. She willingly accepted her call. Then, right up to the death of her son, she did the work of mothering, making sure his needs were provided for, teaching him, and nurturing him. It was the simple ordinary work that all good mothers do, but it was participating in the work of God nevertheless.

How is God calling you to participate in God's work? How can you make the ordinary routines of life a contribution to God's mission?

Practice for Today: We have no way of knowing what it was that made Mary such a willing participant in God's plan. But, we do know that she responded and fulfilled her calling faithfully. In our lives we have the privilege of knowing that God's call comes to us all in some way, and we can prepare our hearts through practices of mindfulness and meditation. Today, make time to be still and to meditate on God's call in your own life.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I am your servant, O God, and I will answer your call.

Christmas Day Monday 25 December 2017

Reading: Luke 2:1-7

Reflection: The Christmas story, as we tell it today, is filled with additions that you won't find in the Bible. There is no mention of a stable. The "inn" or "lodging" that is mentioned in today's reading was probably a guest room in a family home. Joseph's family was from Bethlehem, so he could probably have sought a place to stay with a family member. But, the guest room was already being used, so Mary and Joseph were likely housed in the ground floor courtyard where the domestic animals were kept. Mary probably wasn't alone when she gave birth, but would have had family with her. It wasn't comfortable, but Jesus was born into a home where hospitality was extended even when it was hard to fit all the people in!

In the end this is a very ordinary and natural event. Jesus was born in the way many human children are – in family homes where

everyone makes do with what they have. But, it was the whim of an Emperor who lived miles away and was oblivious to the birth of this child that caused the crowdedness and the need to use a feeding trough as a crib. So it is with God's Reign. In the ordinary, quiet corners of our world, where the powers-that-be would not care to look, God's Reign is revealed in the love between families, and in friends showing hospitality even when it gets uncomfortable. Yet amazingly, it was this child, born in obscurity that began the movement of love and justice that outlasted the Roman Empire!

How can you celebrate not just the birth of a baby, but the birth of a whole new order of love and justice today?

Practice for Today: Christmas Day is rightly a day of praise. But, to praise Jesus and then live by the values and priorities of the Caesars of this world is hypocrisy. Today, as you celebrate the birth of the Christ Child, and share hospitality with family and friends, let your entire life be an expression of praise. And then, let this life of praise overflow into every day of the year.

Breath-Prayer for Today: I praise you, Christ Child, for the new order of love and justice you birthed in our world.

Tuesday 26 December 2017

Reading: Jeremiah 26:1-9,12-15

Reflection: Today's reading may seem strange for the day after Christmas. But, the coming of Jesus was all about the brokenness of human society and the need for a radical new way of being to bring restoration and healing. The problem is that we don't like bad news, and we don't like to be challenged, especially in times of festivity. But, until we are willing to confront our brokenness and turn from our destructive ways, neither we nor our world can be healed.

When God instructed Jeremiah to prophecy destruction on the Temple, the people must have thought he was crazy. There were strong nations competing with each other in their region, and there were internal problems of corruption, injustice, and idolatry. But, the people did not want to hear God's call to justice and compassion. They wanted to believe that God would bless them, no matter what. And so they threatened to kill the prophet – which is what we always tend to do to whistleblowers.

Notice that the people who wanted Jeremiah dead were the religious people – the priests, prophets and worshippers. It was the “secular people” – the city officials – that saved Jeremiah's life. There is a form of religion that invites us to ignore the injustice of our world and to lose ourselves in the escapism of a god who satisfies every whim. Some of us build such a religion on the Christmas story. But, this is not what the incarnation is about. Rather, it is a call to radical obedience to the Reign of God. The baby we celebrate became, like Jeremiah, a whistleblower. He died for proclaiming, and living out, a set of values and priorities that challenged the status quo. Christmas calls us to embrace the way of Jesus and become “little incarnations” that blow the whistle on corruption and injustice.

How can you live the true Christmas message of God's Reign in your life today?

Practice for Today: We often focus on Christmas as a time of celebration and goodwill, and it is. But, it should also be a time when we acknowledge that we often fail to live as “little incarnations” of the goodness and justice of God. It is not enough to have one day of peace and love, and live in violence and hatred for the rest of the year. Nor is it right to use Christmas as a way to escape the demands of God's Reign on our lives. Today, make time to confess any ways you have failed to live as a “little incarnation” in your world.

Breath-Prayer for Today: When I use Christmas as an escape, O God, or when I fail to live as Jesus did, forgive and heal me.

Wednesday 27 December 2017

Reading: Exodus 33:18-23

Reflection: When the time came for Moses to lead God's people away from Mount Sinai, where they had received the Law, and toward the Promised Land, Moses was understandably nervous. He had done the work of liberation and had brought the people to the mountain, as God had instructed him. In his initial call, God had told Moses that God would lead the people to a land of abundance, but he had only instructed Moses to bring the people as far as the mountain. Perhaps Moses thought that when they got to Sinai, his job would be done, and God would arrange for someone else to lead the people further. It is probable that Moses did not expect the

decades long journey through the wilderness with an unruly mob of former slaves! Yet, now, God was telling Moses he was to continue the work, and Moses knew he wasn't up to it. He prayed for God to be with them and to guide them. When God agreed, Moses asked to see God's glorious presence - probably as a confirmation that God would do what God had promised.

The vision of God's glory that Moses received was of God's back, not God's face. This is strange, since in verse 11, we are told that Moses would meet with God "face to face". Yet in this moment, immediately after Israel's idolatry with the golden calf, the writer offers an enacted parable. The dominant belief of that time was that God's holiness would destroy anyone who looked on God's face. So, by hiding Moses from God's face, showing him God's back, and proclaiming a statement of God's grace and mercy (verse 19), the writer explains why God did not destroy Israel for their idolatry, and demonstrates that God's glory and grace are inseparable. The Christmas story offers a similar parable. In Jesus we see God's "face" - God's holiness and glory - and we see God's response to the brokenness of our world, which is to proclaim grace and mercy, and to call us into a life guided by God's presence and priorities.

How can you open yourself to a new vision of God's gracious, holy, glory today?

Practice for Today: There are two calls that we must all face. The first is God's confrontation of injustice, corruption, greed, violence, and lack of compassion. The second is God's invitation to participate in God's Reign of grace, justice, peace, love, and service. One of the primary practices in this work is forgiveness. When we forgive as we are forgiven, we confront the violence and division in our world and we invite others into a measure of peace, healing, and grace. Today, let God's Reign be reflected in your capacity to forgive.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As you forgive me, O God, so I participate in your Reign by forgiving others.

Thursday 28 December 2017

Reading: Jeremiah 31:15-17

Reflection: The people of Judah had been exiled by their Babylonian conquerors and they were feeling hopeless and

abandoned by God. But God had not forgotten God's people, and so the prophet Jeremiah was given a message of hope to share.

Today's reading is part of the much longer prophecy of restoration in chapter 31 of Jeremiah. You may have recognised it from Matthew's Gospel where the writer quotes the verses about weeping in Ramah when Herod kills the children of Bethlehem (see Matthew 2:13-18). But, the original context for these words is God's promise of restoration. It is not that children killed, but that they were gone and would return. This is a sign of new life, of restored families, and of a nation rebuilt. And it would have been a great encouragement to the exiles to hear that God was still at work in their lives.

As we stand on the threshold of another New Year, we may be tempted to feel abandoned by God. As we see the suffering and struggle in the world around us, we may think that God is doing nothing to bring salvation into the world. But, if we can hold on to the hope of Jeremiah's words, we can avoid the despair that leads us to destructive actions and attitudes. And then we can be hope-carriers, like Jeremiah, in our world.

Practice for Today: When we are struggling the practice of thanksgiving can feel like the last thing we want to do. And yet, it is often exactly what we need to remember God's presence and grace and recapture hope in our lives. Today, make a point of finding every thing you can to give thanks for.

Breath-Prayer for Today: Thank you, O God, that you never abandon me, and that your promise of hope is always available.

Friday 29 December 2017

Reading: Isaiah 49:5-15

Reflection: Today we read another of the "Servant Songs" from Isaiah. The collection of prophecies (found in Isaiah 40-55) about a particular servant of God is hard to read without thinking of Jesus. We don't know who Isaiah was actually writing about, but we do know that Jesus fulfilled the role of the servant in his own time. For this reason the Servant Songs give us a helpful lens through which to view the ministry of Jesus. The impact of the Servant's ministry among God's people is amazing and challenging. He is to restore

not only Israel, but also the Gentiles. He will be rejected and despised by people, and yet royalty will stand at attention when he passes by. And through the Servant God's covenant with God's people will be renewed and deepened. Through him God's people will find peace, joy, and sufficiency.

When we think that these words were written during the time of exile when many Israelites were living as refugees in Babylon, we can understand why they would claim that God had deserted and abandoned them. Yet, Isaiah's prophecy would have brought them hope, and would have reassured them that God would never forget them. Now, as we seek to follow the way of Jesus, we are called to be Servants of God in our own time. This means that it is through us that God will bring restoration and life into our world. This will not always be easy. We may be despised, or we may have royalty standing at attention. Either way, though, we are to remind people of God's presence and grace, and of God's call to justice.

How can you live as God's Servant today?

Practice for Today: When we think of praise as something that is expressed only to God, we may fall into a habit of praising God while cursing others and our world. But, this "split personality religion" is not the way of Jesus. While we may confront injustice and evil, we are to do so with love and with a recognition of the goodness and God-image in each person. Today, allow your praise of others and of the goodness in the world to be a tool of transformation.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I praise the goodness in the world and its people, O God, so I call that goodness into being in your name.

Saturday 30 December 2017

Reading: 2 Peter 3:8-13

Reflection: Throughout the Christmas Season we hear messages that resonate with the deepest longings of our hearts. We proclaim peace on earth in a world where peace is just a distant dream for many. We speak about goodwill among people in a world where our fear, suspicion, greed, and self-protectiveness cause us to treat each other with little goodwill. We sing of joy to the world while millions of people grieve and suffer with daily realities that are

anything but joyful. Nevertheless we are bold to make these statements because they remind us of God's mission in the world, and of the hope we have in the Reign of God.

In today's reading, written to a Church in transition probably after the last of the apostles had died, the writer reminds the believers of their hope in God's Reign. He addresses the believers' concerns about why Christ's return had not yet happened, and he reminds them of the true nature of their hope. The language in this passage echoes the metaphorical, apocalyptic language of the prophetic books, and of Jesus' prophecies in the Gospels. The writer is not giving a blueprint for the end times, but is describing the radical change that God seeks to bring into the world that will result in a new heaven and earth filled with God's righteousness (justice). The point of his message is stated in verse 11 - because of what God is doing, we are called to live holy and godly lives, looking forward to the fulfilment of our hope and helping it to come into being through our lives.

How can you live in such a way as to help God's world of justice be revealed a little more in your community today?

Practice for Today: If we are to live by the ways of Jesus in a world of suffering and brokenness, we need to hold on to the hope that is proclaimed in the Christmas Season. This means we need to keep nurturing our longing for God's Reign. When we read the Scriptures we are reminded of God's dream, and this keeps our hope and longing for God's Reign strong. Let your Bible reading strengthen your hope today.

Breath-Prayer for Today: As I read the Scriptures, O God, I receive a hope-strengthening vision of your Reign.

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